H15   The Scientific Working Group for Forensic Anthropology: An Update

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with the recent activities of the Scientific Working Group for Forensic Anthropology (SWGANTH).

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of the SWGANTH's work to establish, identify, and publish "Best Practices" within the forensic anthropology discipline.

In late 2007, the U.S. Department of Defense Central Identification Laboratory (DOD CIL) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) cosponsored the creation of the Scientific Working Group for Forensic Anthropology, or SWGANTH. The group's by-laws were adopted at its first formal meeting on January 8, 2008. The 20-member Executive Board, comprised of professionals from the forensic anthropological community, represent a broad cross-section of expertise and jurisdictional involvement. To this end, the permanent members of the Executive Board were specifically selected to represent large, medium, and small graduate-level academic programs, large and small medical examiner offices, the museum and cultural resource communities, as well as federal, state, and local government agencies. As with other "Scientific Working Groups," the SWGANTH does not function as a regulatory body and lacks any sort of direct coercive authority. Rather, the purpose of the SWGANTH is to identify and recommend current "best practice" within the forensic anthropology discipline, to chart a path into the future, and to bring about voluntary compliance through education and peer involvement. This is being accomplished primarily through the work of approximately 20 sub-committees, each chaired by two or more members of the Executive Board, but populated by forensic anthropologists from around the United States and world. Ultimately, the success of the SWGANTH will be directly proportional to the interest and involvement of the larger forensic anthropology community.

The SWGANTH benefits from having co-sponsors in that it is relatively well funded. The group's Executive Board meets twice annually, in the National Capitol Region in the spring and in Hawaii in the winter. At the June 2010 meeting, hosted by the National transportation Safety Board. the SWGANTH Executive Board reviewed and evaluated the work of the sub-committees, ultimately approving ten "Best Practice" guidelines for promulgation. These were then posted on the SWGANTH website for public dissemination. At the most recent meeting, January 2011, the Board voted on eight additional sub- committee recommendations, bringing the total number of approved "Best Practice" guidelines to 18. These are:

1. Code of Ethics and Conduct
2. [Individual] Qualifications
3. [Forensic Anthropology] Laboratory Management and Quality Assurance
4. Determination of Medicolegal Significance
5. Sex Assessment
6. Pathological Conditions and Anomalies
7. Facial Approximation
8. Age Estimation
9. Skeletal Sampling and Preparation
10. Personal Identification
11. Resolving Commingled Remains
12. Stature Estimation
13. Trauma Analysis
14. Statistical Methods
15. Ancestry Estimation
16. Taphonomy
17. Documentation and Reporting
18. Detection and Recovery of Remains

The SWGANTH Executive Board also created three new sub- committees that have been charged with identifying some of the basic elements common to a well-rounded forensic anthropology educational program, isolating "gaps" in the underlying practice of our discipline, and creating a "self assessment" that will aid forensic anthropologists in evaluating their performance relative to the larger community. As with previous guidelines, drafts of these documents will be posted for public comment for at least 45 days prior to a final evaluation and decision by the SWGANTH Executive Board. No specific timetable was established for these sub-committees to issue their recommendations.

Best Practices, SWGANTH, Guidelines